2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
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Cape Hottentots



## Birth

*Pregnancy*

The ideas of the Hottentots regarding the causes of conception do not appear to have been specially investigated. The fact that in cases of premarital pregnancy the girl's lover is expected to marry her, and in any case has a claim to the child, seems to indicate that physiological paternity is recognized. But there is no concrete information that the Hottentots are acquainted with the connection between sexual intercourse and conception. In their mythology we even meet with a few instances in which women have conceived without having connection with a man. Thus it is told that on one occasion, when some young girls had gone out to fetch firewood, one of them took a kind of sweet juicy grass, chewed it, and swallowed the juice. As a result she became pregnant, and was delivered of a son, Heitsi Eibib, one of the outstanding figures in Hottentot religion and myth.[1] An instance of this kind, however, can, owing to its mythological character, hardly be interpreted as reflecting the normal beliefs of the Hottentots regarding the causes of conception.

On the whole there seems to be a general desire among the people to have children. A barren woman, as we have seen, is looked down upon, and may even have to suffer the mortification of seeing her husband take a concubine. There are also various indications of rites specially designed to secure the birth of children. Graevenbroeck and Kolb, in their descriptions of the Cape Hottentot marriage ceremonies, both state that the person officiating publicly expresses the wish that the young couple will have offspring; and similarly the slaughter of only female animals for the Nama marriage feast is interpreted as due to the desire that the marriage may prove fruitful. Wikar, again, mentions that a barren woman will have recourse to a magician, who strokes her on the abdomen with pieces of horn and wood, and also smears her there with the contents of his medicine horn. Moreover, an ewe heavy with lamb is slaughtered, and the woman must carry the amnion of this unborn lamb on her back, like a child. Also, according to Schinz, women during confinement (*sic*) must eat only goat's flesh in order to promote their fertility.[2]

[1] Hahn, *Tsuni-||Goam*, 69. Another myth of the same kind relates that Heitsi Eibib was born as a young bull of a cow impregnated by eating grass (ibid., 68. The original Nama text is given in Meinhof, *Lehrbuch der Nama-Sprache*, 177).

[2] Wikar, "Berigt van den Heere van Plettenberg," 104; Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, 97.

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842 As a rule boys are preferred to girls, since they increase the military strength of the tribe and help to defend its herds, as well as to augment them on raiding expeditions.[1] There is no record, however, of any observances or food specially designed to secure the birth of male children, although, as we have seen, the husband of a woman who has only borne daughters may take a concubine.

847 [842] [825] [824] Women who do not want children achieve their aim mainly by abortion, which is not infrequently practised. Contraceptives are apparently unknown. The principal abortifacient is the inspissated urine and fæces of the rock rabbit or dassie (*Hyrax capensis*), gathered from the clefts and crannies it inhabits. A decoction of this, boiled and strained, is taken in large doses, if necessary for several days in succession. A certain thorn bush (*Sarcocaulon sp.*), pounded whole and boiled, is also used, while still another method is to keep binding the abdomen tightly round with leather straps until delivery is forced on.[2] No motives are given by our authorities for abortion, although presumably it is practised chiefly in case of illegitimate pregnancy. According to Wandres, both the woman and anybody assisting her to procure abortion are, if discovered, brought before the tribal council and punished by thrashing, while at least five sheep or goats are claimed as court fees. The usual number of lashes for such an offence is forty, of which the woman's lover can, if he wishes, take over twenty.[3] The same punishment was given to a pregnant woman if the women massaging her found on her abdomen the striations of an old, secret delivery.[4]

847 682

843 The first symptoms of pregnancy, according to Hottentot ideas, are usually not the cessation of menstruation, but the onset of sickness, vomiting, lack of appetite, etc., providing that the woman does not normally suffer from these complaints. From the time that she feels herself pregnant, she is carefully massaged on the abdomen two or three times a week, for an hour to an hour and a half at a time, by two of the old women of the camp, who take note of the growth and position of the fœtus. Conception, according to their ideas, takes place in the bladder, where a second bladder is formed in which the embryo is then enclosed. The uterus is only an appendix to the

[1] Von François, *Nama und Damara*, 214; Olpp, *Angra Pequena*, 27; Schultze, "Südwestafrika," 206–7.
[2] Schultze, *Namaland und Kalahari*, 320; Laidler, "Magic Medicine of the Hottentots," 443, 445, 446; Wandres, "Ueber das Recht der Naman," 668.
[3] Wandres, loc. cit.; cf. Kohler, "Das Recht der Hottentotten," 355.
[4] Schultze, *Namaland und Kalahari*, 319.

The [latter's mother]

gets her married sisters and her brothers' wives to make a little mat enclosure, *'kharu oms*, inside at the back of the family hut, on the left hand side. This enclosure is a screened-off segment, measuring two to three feet across at its widest point, in the least regarded part of the hut; and it always has its own little opening leading out behind the hut. While it is being got ready the mother goes to fetch a woman who, though now past childbearing, has been renowned for her former fertility. This woman takes the girl on her back (whence she is known by the name *aba tarás*), carries her into the *kharu oms*, and cares for her while she is there. Should the period come on in the veld far from home, the girl's companions will on no account let her walk, lest all the roots and berries in her path scorch up, but will do their best to carry her home on their backs, taking turn and turn about.

Once in the *kharu oms*, the girl must lie quite still, wrapped closely in her sheepskin kaross. The wind must on no account blow on her, nor must she be exposed to the sun. She may not leave her little hut except at night, and then it must be by the back opening, with one woman behind her and one in front to screen her from view. All the time she is thus secluded she must be careful not to touch cold water on any pretence whatever, nor may she speak above a whisper. It is said that if she talks aloud she will be a chatterbox and muddle in all sorts of affairs later, and will get a bad name among the people. The hearth fire in the outer hut is now also */nau*, and nothing at all may be cooked at it, nor may any pregnant or menstruating or sterile woman come and sit by it, lest dire misfortune befall the girl. No man or boy, again, will come near her, for fear of dread consequences to himself. It is believed that should anyone infringe these or any of the other */nau* restrictions during this time, some sort of sexual disease would beset him; and this could only be prevented from proving fatal if he were able to persuade the *aba tarás* (the old woman officiating) to inoculate him with her "essence" and so free him.

The girl, however, is visited by her older girl friends, who grind sweet-smelling leaves and bark into powder for her, with which she is copiously covered. The time of her seclusion is variously reported as from two or three days to a month. Some girls who had recently been through the rites said they had been secluded for a fortnight; and Mrs. Hoernlé is inclined to think that most probably the time was longer in days gone by, for one of the chief things required of the girl while in her little hut is that she should get fat, with a smoothly shining skin.

[1] [The girl's mother. — Analyst]

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water. The *aba tarás* then fills the girl's water-pot and her own, puts the former on the girl's head, and the procession returns home. The girl is now free to use water whenever she likes, except when she is menstruating.

In addition to this rite of reintroduction to water there is, according to Hahn, another rite to be performed before the girl is finally free from the restrictions imposed upon her. She must run about quite naked in the first thunderstorm coming on after her festival, so that the rain pours down and washes her whole body. The belief is that this causes her to be fruitful and have many children. He states that he has on three occasions witnessed this running in the rain, when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning.[1]

With these final rites of aggregation the ceremony is at an end. The girl is able once more to take part in the routine life of the community, only now she is regarded as ready for marriage. During her subsequent periods, however, she is again */nau*, and although there is apparently no feasting or special seclusion, she must observe the same injunctions as when she first menstruates. Thus she may not enter the cattle-fold, let alone milk; it is believed that if she does milk a cow, its milk will turn to blood. Similarly, if she cooks a meal, those who eat it, especially men, will be very ill. Above all she must avoid cold water, for, as Mrs. Hoernlé points out, there is this great difference between most things a menstruating woman is forbidden to do, and the touching of cold water—cold water she can never harm, it will always harm her, if she uses it when she should not, whereas it is she who pollutes other things that she touches and makes them */nau*. Mrs. Hoernlé records an instance of a woman dying suddenly, whose death was unhesitatingly attributed to the fact that she had her period, yet started to do her mistress's washing in cold water. Other women, again, who had been working for white people, said that they were now sickly and never bore any children, because they had been made to work with cold water when they should not have done so.[2]

Nowadays the Naman find it very inconvenient to have their women incapacitated so often and unable to attend to their daily tasks, and Mrs. Hoernlé goes on to say they have discovered that for most women it is quite safe to do these tasks, except that they must

[1] *Tsuni-||Goam*, 87 (also quoted by Hoernlé); cf. Schinz, loc. cit.
[2] "Social Value of Water," 324–5.

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759 the nature of the complaint. But there is nowhere any full statement as to who all the persons are who may respectively act in this way. The only mention of professional healers, apart from the "herbalists" referred to by Laidler, is Kolb's statement that in every Cape Hottentot kraal there was a man chosen by the old men of the kraal to act as physician and surgeon, because of his knowledge of herbs and surgical and medical treatment. His office was not hereditary. On his death the old men selected another man with similar qualifications; and if no one suitable could be found in their own kraal, they fetched him in from another. In the meantime such of the old women as had a knowledge of herbs and could make the surgical cuts undertook the treatment of the sick.[1] How far this statement can be regarded as accurate in all its details is difficult to say. The whole social aspect of medicine among the Hottentots has been somewhat ignored, and it is not always possible to reconcile the different statements as to the practitioners employed. Nor, except in the case of the *top* diseases, can we ascertain clearly how far the practitioners profess or are believed to cure all diseases, or whether they specialize on particular cases. And, apart from the account given by Mrs. Hoernlé, there is no full description of the ceremonies attaching to the cure or attempted cures.

757 On the actual methods of treatment adopted we have more adequate information, thanks mainly to the detailed descriptions given by Schultze and Laidler, as well as the older writers such as Graevenbroeck and Kolb.[2] Massage, as we have just seen, is widely used for diffuse pains attributed to the wanderings of the internal organs, the object being to restore each organ to its proper place. We have also [842 841] previously noted its use in connection with pregnancy, and, according to Laidler, unfruitful women or those behind their time with menstruation are likewise massaged on the abdomen, in the former case with a downward, in the latter with a rolling movement.

752 The knowledge of surgery is limited.[3] Dislocations are reduced by rubbing the joint briskly with fat and then moving the limb up and down vigorously. A broken limb is first wrapped in skin, care being taken to allow free circulation of the blood; then narrow splints of wood are tied round it to form a sort of sheath, and left until the 752 bone is firm again. Amputation of the finger joint, a common practice 304 in the past, was cleverly performed with the aid of a ligature. Kolb

[1] Op. cit., 44–5.
[2] Schultze, op. cit., 211–14; 233–6; Laidler, op. cit., 424–36; Graevenbroeck, op. cit., 19 ff.; Kolb, op. cit., 148–55; cf. also Nolte, op. cit., 630–1.
[3] Kolb, op. cit., 149–53; Schultze, op. cit., 211–14; Laidler, op. cit., 436–7.

3: Hoernlé E-5 (1912-1913) 1918 FX13 Hottentot FX13
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house is free so that anyone can come in"). The girl is now ready to receive visits as an ǂáxais, that is, a young marriageable woman. All her relatives and friends pour in, each one with some present of beads, or earrings, or other finery. A great deal of this is loaned only and is returned later. The girl shines with clean, well-greased skin. She is scented all over with the sáp which she and her girl friends have ground. Her face is painted in curious patterns with ǃnaop and /quasab ("ground white stone"), and her body is loaded with her presents. Then it is that the little boys, even up to sixteen years and more,[1] come into the hut from which they have up to now been excluded, and go in to the newly made ǂáxais. She takes her /táros ǂnas ("powder puff") full of sáp and rubs their testicles (ǂharún). This ensures fertility and is a protection against sexual disease. The full expression for this custom is /táros ǂnas /a /naru ("to rub gently with a powder puff"). Nowadays the saying is that until the boys have been rubbed, it is too dangerous for them to eat any of the meat prepared for the girl, and the younger ones especially go eagerly in, so that they may join in the feast. Some of the youths, according to Hannah, prefer to go without the meat, and none of my witnesses had ever seen grown-up men take part. It looks as though the custom were gradually dying out.

The feasting reaches its climax on this day. Female animals, both ewes and heifers, are killed, cooked, and eaten. It is interesting to note that the goat is never used in these ceremonial meals, if it can possibly be avoided. This is probably due to the fact that originally the Hottentots owned no goats, and only acquired them quite late from the Bantu tribes with whom they came in contact.

Towards evening the girl's friends enter the hut to fetch her out. She must leave the hut by the special door which has been made for her at the back.[2] Her friends surround her, and for a time try to keep her from the view of the youths, for she is very shy. The youths start the reed dance, and the girls dance round them with the ǂáxais in their midst. Gradually the youths get to the side of the girl and choose her as a partner, and in the end her shyness gives way. In these Hottentot dances the men form the inner ring, the women the outer one, and every now and then there is a change of partners somewhat like the English game of Jolly Miller. During the dancing the ǂáxais throws sáp over the men and boys as she sees them. This is supposed to bring good luck. The dancing lasts often right through the night, and when it is over, the final round of rites begins, reintroducing the girl to her daily tasks, freeing her, as it were, from the spell under which she has been living.

The ubi taris must accompany the ǂáxais in all these rites, but often her friends go

[1] According to T. Hahn, in olden days, all but extremely old men took part in this ceremony. Cf. also L. Schultze, Aus Namaland und Kalahari, Jena, 1907, p. 208.

[2] A corpse is also taken out by a special door made for the purpose at the back of the hut.

3: Hoernlé E-5 (1912-1913) 1918 FX13 Hottentot FX13
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881 with her too. First a visit is paid to the cattle kraal where sáp is strewn on all the male animals, also on the trees and bushes which they pass by. This was great luck, said one old man to me, and the day after such a girl had come out of her hut it was sure to rain and there would be plenty in the land; "now the white men have come, the rain has ceased, and the people are miserable." Then a cow is milked with the help of the old woman. If possible this is a young cow calving for the first time. The old woman supports the girl's arm while she milks. This milk is ǃnau, to be drunk only by the old woman herself or others of her age. Once this milking has taken place, the girl can resume her milking duties with impunity. Next a visit is made to the spring. The girl carries her water pot, (//ko-ás) on her head. Arrived at the spring, the woman with a branch from a tree strikes the water, scattering it over the girl. She then rubs the girl's legs and arms with clay (ǂgoáb), fills the pot, and places it on the girl's head. The girl is then free to draw water as she pleases.

Hahn [18] states that when the relatives appear for the feast at the end of the seclusion, her nearest male relative (usually the eldest unmarried cousin) takes the fat of the heifer which has been killed, hangs it over her head, and wishes that she may be as fruitful as a young cow and have many children. The other friends repeat the wish. Further,[19] [842] the girls who have come of age must after the festival run about in the first thunderstorm quite naked, so that the rain pours down and washes the whole body. The belief is that this causes them to be fruitful and have many children. He says he has on three occasions witnessed this running in the thunder rain when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning.

881 When men are giving an account of this puberty ceremony for women, the chief
783 thing they lay stress on is the *ǃnau dêip*, i. e., the milk obtained from the first milking by the girl who has just come out of the khará óms. Indeed, it was in this context that I first lit on the word ǃnau and all it means. Gottlieb had been describing the ceremony from his point of view, and when he mentioned the ǃnau dêip and the serious consequences which would follow if any man were inadvertently to drink it, I asked him what ǃnau meant and he burst out: "What is absent from this ǃnau? Everything is ǃnau, or used to be; warriors returning from a battle were ǃnau, a sick man is ǃnau, a widow," etc. etc.

783 Should anyone infringe any of the ǃnau injunctions during these puberty rites, some sort of sexual disease would beset him, and this could only be prevented from proving fatal, if he were able to persuade the abá tarás to inoculate and so free him. The method of this inoculation, which is much the same wherever it occurs, will be fully described in the next section.

[18] T. Hahn, loc. cit. [19] Cf. Idem, Tsuni //Goam, p. 87.

6: Hoernlé E-5 (1912-1913)1923
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823 852 the navel string has fallen off. In Walvis Bay the baby is taken out and turned over and over in the rain by the mother or grandmother, so that it will know the rain and not be frightened of it, I was told. An Africander woman gave me a rather different account. The baby is taken out by one of the women who has been present at the birth, and is laid on a piece of skin in the rain. The old woman jumps over the child and back again; then lifts it up, tossing it this way and that in the rain, saying, " Hei-a Hei-a Tú gaba tai " (I toss you in the rain). This is done, said the old woman, so that the rain will not hurt the baby. It is the baby's introduction to the source of water.

823 881 [842] Of another type of case I have never been able to get information myself among the tribes I have visited, but Theophilus Hahn writes: " The girl or girls who have become of age must, after the festival, run about in the first thunderstorm, but they must be quite naked, so that the rain which pours down washes the whole body. The belief is that they will get fruitful and have a large offspring." He continues: " I have on three occasions witnessed this running in the thunder rain, when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning. This was among the !Gami /Nun; among the gei /Khauas at //Nuis, and among the //Ogeis on the banks of the !Kham River."*

These three tribes I have never visited myself and do not know if this ceremony used to take the place of the usual method of reintroducing the girls to water, or whether it was additional. I rather think it must have been additional, otherwise the girls would be prevented from using water over too long periods in many cases. The underlying motive of the ceremony seems the same as in the many we have noticed. The girls being now full members of society, the rain will protect them and help them to attain the full life of their new status.

823 182 Such are the Nama ceremonies connected with water. I have tried to show that they are all intelligible and form an harmonious whole if we realise that water is, of all the essentials of a social life, the most difficult for this primitive people to provide, that it is, therefore, one of their most important social possessions, and is invested with great power, essentially protective and wholesome so long as social life runs its normal course, but exceedingly dangerous to all the forces which threaten society, or to the members of the society themselves when the social bonds are loosened.

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* *Tsuni //Goam*, p. 87.

7: Laidler D-5 (ca. 1925) 1928
FX13 Hottentot FX13



### Massage.

757 755 Where pain was felt, fat was rubbed in. If this was unsuccessful, then the doctor performed passes over the part with his hands, and then let drop a piece of wood from the nose and asserted that it was out of the patient's flesh. (Campbell.) Plasters of fat were applied from a freshly killed animal, and motions made with the hands over the plaster, so that medicine was combined with magic. Should that fail, then incisions were made. Massage was, and still is, in common [844] use, and is called P/kouroe. When women are behind their time with menstruation a rolling movement of the hand on the stomach is the correct method of treatment, and presumably it was a loosening motion. For pains and sprains, punching, kneading, and rolling are employed. P/koo is the transference of heat from a fire to the part affected by the intermediation of the hand, which is warmed and applied gently. In the case [842] of the unfruitful woman, she is massaged downwards on the abdomen. If this does not produce the desired effect, then the P/gai aup may be consulted, and he may do the rubbing.

### Surgery.

752 The Hottentots' knowledge of surgery was limited. They successfully reduced dislocations. The joint was rubbed briskly with fat and the limb then moved briskly up and down. For example, a dislocation of the right shoulder would be reduced by gripping the patient's hand as though about to shake, and then vigorously pulling him towards and then pushing him away from one. Campbell says that they tied splinters of wood around broken limbs and left them until the bone was firm again.

Amputation of a finger joint was common and possibly led to experiments upon larger limbs. Kolben states that the head of the joint of the finger was tied up with sinew, and then [278] cut through below. To the raw surface, leaves of myrrh and sweet herbs were applied and tied on. He suggests that this method was used for the removal of larger limbs, and a skeleton found near Garies showed that a limb might be removed or lost and the patient live for at least a while afterwards. Our old Nama woman stated that the "old people," when a leg was badly broken, amputated it through the knee joint after tying a thong tightly around the lower end of the thigh. It is common knowledge that the native is an expert at disjointing any animal. 232 The operation of gelding animals, especially bull calves, was in daily use and was performed by bruising the testicles between two stones. The monorchism, so frequently 142 referred to by early travellers when writing of the Hottentot, was doubtless the application of the same method to male babies with the intention of reducing the number of twins born —once again a sympathetic reason.

14:Hahn L-5 (ca. 1870-1880) 1881 FX13 Hottentot FX13



22. Another custom, common to Khoikhoi, Bushmen and Berg-Damara—of whom the latter have entirely adopted the Khoikhoi language and manners—is the practice of cutting off a finger. This is done even to new-born children who are not a day old. As all sicknesses are expected to come from ǂGauna, or from his servants, the practitioners of witchcraft, it appears that this custom is a kind of sacrifice or offering to ǂGuana; and we are entitled to conclude that, in very remote times, human sacrifice must have been practised by the Hottentot race.

23. If a woman's or young girl's breasts itch, they say: "My son, my cousin, or some near relation, will soon arrive."

24. If a cow, during the night commences to groan in her sleep, the next morning she is caught, and a piece of skin, just above the nose, is cut, so that it hangs down in the shape of an ear-ring or *ear-drops*. If this be neglected, the owner of the cow soon will die.

25. If a girl becomes of age, or if a wedding is to be celebrated, nothing but cows and sheep-ewes may be slaughtered; and if any other cattle is killed the couple is sure to live unhappy. The fattest cow or the finest young heifer is chased about the place by the young men, and thrown with stones and beaten with clubs, until she is so exhausted and trembling with fear that she allows everybody to come near and touch her. If she still should kick and show fight, it is a sure sign that the marriage will be a continuation of fights and quarrels between husband and wife.

26. The girl or girls who have become of age must, after the festival, run about in the first thunderstorm, but they must be quite naked, so that the rain which pours down washes the whole body. The belief is that they will get fruitful and have a large offspring. I have on three occasions witnessed this running in the thunder-rain, when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning. This was among the ǂGamiǂnus, on the banks of the Geiǁāb